

Gulf Seafood Safety & the BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill

The Obama administration is carrying out an *aggressive, comprehensive, coordinated, multi-agency program to ensure the safety of Gulf seafood* – working across federal agencies and with state and local officials, and the seafood industry, to closely monitor the effects of the BP Deepwater Horizon oil spill and its potential impact on seafood safety. This includes rigorous testing throughout the process of bringing Gulf seafood to market – from active monitoring of the fisheries where seafood is caught to the inspection of companies that catch and sell Gulf seafood to the frequent testing of seafood caught in the Gulf to ensure that all seafood that goes to market is safe.

Seafood from open waters is safe to eat. Extensive steps are being taken to ensure that remains the case.

Here are the facts:

1. ***When waters were impacted by oil, or at the risk of being impacted, they were closed to fishing.***

Closing oiled areas to fishing is the primary tool for preventing the entry of tainted fish and fishery products into the marketplace. The federal government has taken a precautionary approach – closing areas where there is oil on the surface or sub-surface, and areas that do not currently have oil but where NOAA projects there will be oil. To ensure safety, a five-mile buffer around these areas is included around any area that meets one of these criteria as an extra precaution. The Coast Guard and NOAA are monitoring the closed federal areas to ensure there is no fishing within those areas, and will take enforcement action against vessels that violate closure boundaries.

2. ***Areas are considered for reopening only once they are free of oil.***

The administration, working with the health and fisheries authorities from the Gulf States, has developed a protocol to ensure any area that has been closed to fishing is safe prior to being reopened. That process starts once an area is free of oil. Following such a determination, samples from the area must pass sensory and chemical testing conducted by the FDA and NOAA.

3. ***Every seafood sample from reopened waters has undergone rigorous testing for oil and dispersants – and every sample from reopened waters has passed those tests.***

Federal seafood safety experts have implemented a rigorous, risk-based sampling regime.

- **Sampling from Areas Considered for Reopening:** Samples are collected from closed fishing areas and are brought to shore for immediate testing before those areas are reopened. NOAA has also collected baseline specimens and has sampled outside the closure.
 - **Sensory Testing:** Seafood samples undergo rigorous sensory testing by expert panels at NOAA's seafood testing laboratory in Pascagoula, Miss. These experts can detect down to one part oil in 1 million parts seafood. Once the samples pass the sensory test, they are sent for chemical testing.
 - **Chemical Analysis:** Both NOAA and the FDA are performing chemical testing on seafood products from the Gulf at labs across the country. This analysis tests for hydrocarbon compounds and ensures that seafood products caught in the Gulf are safe for the consumer.
 - **Dockside Sampling:** In an effort to add an additional level of screening, NOAA has implemented a targeted sampling program that tests fish as they are brought into the docks from commercial fishing vessels.
 - **Risk-Based Seafood Processor Monitoring:** FDA has implemented a risk-based surveillance sampling program targeting seafood products at Gulf Coast seafood processors – targeting oysters, crabs and shrimp, which could retain contaminants longer than finfish. This sampling provides verification that seafood on the market is safe.
4. ***Dispersants have not been used in the Gulf since July 19, were not applied in areas that have been opened for fishing, and tests of reopened waters do not show the presence of any dispersants.***

To date, every seafood sample from reopened waters has passed sensory testing for contamination by oil and dispersants. Scientific data indicate that the dispersants used to combat the oil spill break down rapidly and become highly dispersed in Gulf waters. Scientific data to date also indicate that dispersants do not accumulate in seafood. Of the thousands of water samples tested by NOAA and EPA, to date only two have shown the presence of dispersant. Both were from near the wellhead and not close to any area being considered for reopening.

Visit www.NOAA.gov or www.FDA.gov for more information about the federal government's seafood sampling programs. Some frequently asked questions can be answered [here](#). Call 1-888-INFO-FDA with questions or concerns about seafood or to report any seafood that you suspect of being contaminated.